

FOGARTY'S THIRTEEN

Entry No. 74 in Our Prize Story Competition

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THAT was something of a jump Fogarty made,—one month sweating as assistant machinist in a cheap garage in New Jersey, and the next in full command of a United States warship, with the rank and insignia of Commander! The advance was so rapid that Fogarty never did get the letter written to Kate Molloy, telling her about it; for events sped with a haste that left his slowly scrawled letter all unfinished. But, although he had no time to get a uniform that fit, and had to wear one with trousers that turned up a foot at the bottom and a coat that could have been wrapped around him twice, Fogarty was the proudest man under the flag.

"If the war don't end before I'm ready for it," said Fogarty, "I'll be in the midst of it before it's ended!"

War had been declared with an unexpectedness that took the breath away, and the thousands of requisitioned automobiles, piling into the rendezvous on Long Island after wild drives across country, were in a sorry state. Mike Fogarty of the 72d New Jersey was one of the first to be dragged from the ranks when experienced mechanics were called for. He was hurried to Hempstead Plain and set to work making repairs. He worked in a state of greasiness that made his red hair masquerade as black for three weeks, and then the fliers arrived and Fogarty was shifted from the garages to the hangars.

It was a mixed lot of aeroplanes that the Government got together in that first fleet; but it included every machine in the country. All the American machines were there, as well as the forty-odd that had come over for the international meet; and many arrived in bad shape, for the Government had bought all, even those which had been wrecked at the meet the night of the big wind, and Fogarty was put to work on them. There was no difficulty in securing airmen to run the things,—for every flier in the country was eager to have a hand in the first real experience with aeroplanes in war,—but Fogarty, sweating over the big fourteen- and eighteen-cylinder machines, could see little difference between glorious war and a busy day at the East Orange garage. He had his hands full, and it was all rush work; for the foreign fleet was supposed to be drawing nearer every day.

Where the fleet would strike our coast no one knew. Some said it would approach New York and send out an aerial fleet from shipdeck to drop dynamite on the city. In that case the aerial fleet we had got together would have a real battle in the air. If the foreigners did not carry aeroplanes, our fliers would be used in an attempt to destroy the enemy's war vessels. The repairing and tuning up were hurried breathlessly.

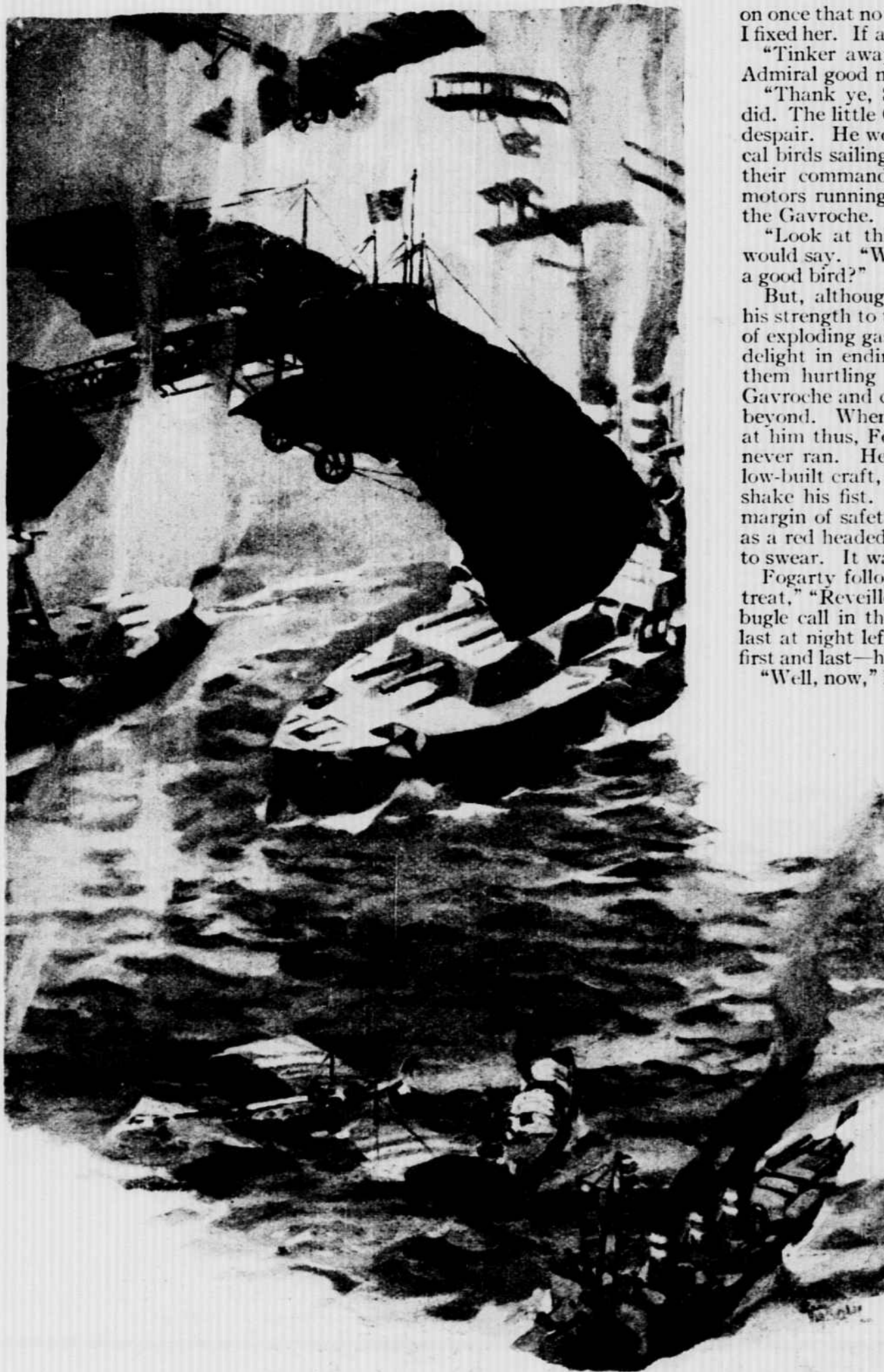
FOGARTY was sweating over one of the smaller machines, a foreign monoplane, when the newly created Admiral of the Air came by, followed by all the airmen; for he was distributing the commands. It was simple enough, as a rule, for he gave the command of a machine to the man who had flown it; but when he reached the little Gavroche flyer on which Fogarty was working all laughed, even the thin faced, businesslike Admiral.

"Number Thirteen, eight-cylinder Gavroche monoplane," said the Admiral. "Who wants it?"

"Not on your life, Admiral!" said Wilson, one of the airmen still without a command. "I want a flier. That Gavroche don't fly, and it was never intended to fly. I don't want it."

"I don't blame you," said the Admiral. "I don't know why the Government spent good cash for it."

For the little Gavroche was built to be the clown of the aeroplane circus; to make fun at the great international meets. It was the aeroplane joke. Narrow winged and low, its motors were too powerful for its size, and yet it would not fly. When the motors started the propeller fan revolved at terrific speed, with a noise like a sawmill, the whole monoplane shook and trembled, as if threatening to leap from the earth and do marvelous feats of speed or altitude, and when expectation was at its height the little Gavroche started. Bump!



In Half an Hour Not One of the Great Man-Birds Was Left.

bump! bump! it went, in short, comical leaps across the field. The airman had to be strapped to his seat. A race between two of the little monoplanes was as funny as a race between two kangaroos. It was indeed the clown of the air show!

Fogarty, wrench in hand, with streaks of grease across his face, listened respectfully. "Get in it, Wilson," said the Admiral. "Show it off!"

"Beggin' your pardon, Sir," said Fogarty, touching his hair, "but the injine is not workin' yet, Sir. Mebby in a day or two, when I—"

"You see, Admiral," said Wilson, laughing, "the trick mule will not even do its tricks. Do you think the engine will ever work?"

"Well, I dunno," said Fogarty, scratching his chin. "I've seen automobile injines, an' I've seen motorcycle injines, an' I've worked some on airplane injines; but never did I see an injine like this one! No, Sir! 'Tis a wonderful contraption!"

"Wilson," said the Admiral, "you will take command of Number Fourteen. As for this thing—my man, what is your name?"

"Fogarty, Sir; Michael Fogarty, of the 72d New Jersey," said Fogarty, standing straight and saluting with his greasy wrench.

"All right, Mike," said the Admiral, "take command of Number Thirteen, with the rank of Commander. Someone has to take her."

I'M much obliged to ye, Sir," said Fogarty, as the Admiral turned away laughing. "I beg pardon, Sir, but would it be beneath the dignity of the United States now should I keep on tinkerin' at me ship? I'm not wantin' to do anything to dishonor the uniform of Commander; but I well remember an automobile I worked

on once that no one said would ever turn wheel more, an' I fixed her. If a bit of grease on a man now an' again—"

"Tinker away, Commander, tinker away!" said the Admiral good naturedly.

"Thank ye, Sir," said Fogarty, and tinker away he did. The little Gavroche was his pride; but she was his despair. He would look up at the great white mechanical birds sailing majestically over the practice grounds, their commanders in their neat uniforms, and their motors running true, and then he would turn back to the Gavroche.

"Look at thim, now, Gavvy, an' take shame!" he would say. "Why don't ye get up an' fly in the air like a good bird?"

But, although he spun his propeller blades with all his strength to turn the engine over, no cheering sputter of exploding gas rewarded him. The other airmen took delight in ending their flights with a dip that brought them hurtling down as if to land full on top of the Gavroche and crush it, only to land gracefully fifty feet beyond. When the huge, white, roaring things darted at him thus, Fogarty felt a temptation to run; but he never ran. He spread his arms protectingly over the low-built craft, and when the danger was past he would shake his fist. Sometimes he laughed; but when the margin of safety had been too small he swore heartily, as a red headed mechanic from New Jersey knows how to swear. It was not profane; but it was whole souled.

Fogarty followed no regulation hours. "Taps," "Retreat," "Reveille," were all the same to him. The first bugle call in the morning found him at work, and the last at night left him tinkering at the Gavroche, and—first and last—he picked up the full jargon of the airmen.

"Well, now," he would say, "if ye meet a cross current four hundred feet up, an' the inclination of the planes is forty-five degrees, would ye cut into it or slide down the flaw?"

"That's not the question," his tormentor would answer. "If the Gavroche is out cutting grass and you see a hitching post ahead, would you tie to the post or would the sick bug stand without tying?"

"Sure," Fogarty would say good naturedly, "I'm thinkin' she'll stand without tyin'. She's well broke, the darlin'!"

"Broke is the word, Mike," the answer would be.

"Well, I dunno," Fogarty would say, looking at the Gavroche affectionately. "She's havin' a good rest. Whin she does fly she ought to fly like the dickens an' all!"

AND that described it! It was a day when Fogarty least expected it that she came to life. Fogarty had been working on her all morning, and he stepped in front of her and gave the propeller a turn,—she had her propeller forward,—and to his amazement she began to spark. The next moment a blade of the fan sent him head over heels, and the Gavroche was off, unguided and alone, across the field, her rudder flapping at will. Fogarty was on his feet in an instant and after her as hard as he could run, yelling like an Indian.

With no man aboard she leaped high in the air and, as the air caught her rudder, darted down again with a jolt that threatened to wreck her to pieces; only to dart to the right, scurry along the grass, and leap again. She danced, cavorted, leaped, and dived, and twice she turned on Fogarty, and he had to take to his heels and run for his life. The second time, as she whirled about, Fogarty made a dive for her tail and caught it.

For the next five minutes Fogarty lived a fast life. Sometimes his feet touched the ground for an instant, or, as she swerved, his heels cracked together like the snapper of a whip; but with her rudder held down as it was she behaved like a tethered skyrocket, making one leap straight into the air after another, jerking Fogarty off his feet and across the field in wild bounds. Sometimes he was right side up, and sometimes not; but he held on until she ended her runaway by jamming her nose into a tree at the far side of the field. The suddenness of the stop threw Fogarty head over heels into the network of wires that supported her planes, and her propeller and fore parts were crushed and splintered, her wings drooping, and her rudder, still in Fogarty's grip, torn off; but she was still an aeroplane, and Fogarty, rubbing his red head, found he was still a live man.

"Just for that," he said as he crawled out of the wreck, "ye don't get any more gasoline to eat fer three days!"

But it was more than three days before she was capable of holding gasoline again.

"Say nawthin'!" said Fogarty to the airmen who teased him. "She flew, the darlin', an' if the war don't end before she flies again I'll be in it!"

They laughed. There must be stanch planes and tried motors, steady hands and rapid thinking, to leave